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Biology graduate student wins 2018 Averitt Award for Research Excellence

MAY 17, 2018

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Jose A. Sanchez-Ruiz, a graduate student in Georgia Southern University's Department of Biology, is the 2018 winner of the Averitt Award for Research Excellence. The Averitt Award is the highest honor bestowed upon graduate students within the Jack N. Averitt College of Graduate Studies.

Sanchez-Ruiz is a native of Puerto Rico. After deciding to "try science," he switched his major from art to biology and graduated from the University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras in 2016. That same year he joined the graduate program in biology at Georgia Southern where he works as a graduate assistant under the direction of Checo Colon-Gaud, Ph.D.

"For his productive research, both locally and internationally, Jose A. Sanchez-Ruiz is an exemplary member of the Department of Biology's graduate program and a deserving recipient of the Averitt Award for Research Excellence," said Steve Vives, Ph.D., chair of the Department.

Recognized for his research in the field of aquatic ecology, Sanchez-Ruiz studies the role that aquatic macroinvertebrates (animals such as aquatic insects, crayfish and snails) play in breaking down and decomposing leaf litter that falls into the Ogeechee River.

Decomposing vegetation provides much of the energy and nutrients to support healthy food chains in streams and rivers. More importantly, Sanchez-Ruiz studies how this rate changes as a function of extreme events such as floods and drought, which are expected to increase in response to a warming climate.

"In Georgia, the Environmental Protection Agency predicts a higher frequency of droughts and floods," said Sanchez-Ruiz. "Long-term ecological studies are necessary to understand the implication of this. I am trying to meet this need with my research."

Sanchez-Ruiz has authored five peer-reviewed research publications, presented his research findings widely and in Fall 2017 received an International Research Experience Fellowship from the National Science Foundation to conduct research in sub-Antarctic Chile.

He worked with Chilean and U.S. colleagues to study the effects of non-native trout on local stream ecosystems in order to better understand the importance of healthy streams to the indigenous people of southern Chile.

Georgia Southern University, a public Carnegie Doctoral/Research institution founded in 1906, offers 141 degree programs serving more than 27,000 students through nine colleges on three campuses in Statesboro, Savannah, Hinesville and online instruction. A leader in higher education in southeast Georgia, the University provides a diverse student population with expert faculty, world-class scholarship and hands-on learning opportunities. Georgia

